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A STATEMENT FROM THE VIRGINIA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

It is difficult for a purely professional organization such as the Virginia Teachers Association to enter into a political struggle, but when the very life of the schools is involved -- and the lives and careers of our children -- the VTA must speak. We cannot retreat from principle.

This is a time for action. We propose the following procedure: We are opposed to the concept of private schools operated with public finance, and urge all legal action be expedited to avoid this error in the plan of the Gray Commission. The seed here is undemocratic and unworthy of our hope for a nation living under a framework of productive liberty and dangerous to the continuation and development of the Virginia Public School System.

We opposed the referendum itself on January 9th, as announced earlier, because we do not believe under any circumstances the issue of destroying the public schools in Virginia should be a question in the minds of Virginians.

Now that the referendum is upon us, we take the following position: We urge that "No Convention" be voted. This in effect would keep the schools in a proper status of the responsibility of the public treasury, and would serve notice to Virginians to proceed to develop schools along both public and democratic lines.

We are aware of what is presently proposed, that is, to change Sec. 141 of the Constitution of Virginia, and further, we have listened attentively and read carefully the statements of those who are determined to change our Constitution, but we believe the people of Virginia should not only know what is proposed, but also know what is behind these proposals. Try as we may to believe otherwise, we

know that this Commission was established to evade and circumvent the established law and order of our country and her people.

Now, we are asked to act with speed unheard of in Virginia, since its founding days, on a problem of the greatest possible magnitude - to tamper with the Constitution of Virginia. We believe that this great rush is unworthy in itself and are convinced that there should be no changing of our Constitution at this time. We who teach feel that our first responsibility is to preserve the public school system of Virginia, for the public schools are the greatest asset that this Commonwealth or any other state can have. We, therefore, are for the retention of the public schools and are forced to take a position of opposition to all those who would change the Constitution and, thereby, open the door for the destruction of the public school system of Virginia.

The Virginia Teachers Association wants the public schools preserved and we ask all citizens to join hands in the preservation of the most important public institution - Our public schools in Virginia.

Let all Virginians who love the Old Dominion know now, that if the Constitution can be changed in this fashion and for this purpose - A precedent will have been set which can ultimately lead to the destruction of our free democratic society of Virginia.

We, who have the responsibility of teaching the young respect for government and the duly constituted processes of law and order, ~~and we~~ are seriously concerned because the whole import of this proposed Constitutional change is based on violating, evading and disregarding the very law and order and duly constituted processes of law and order which our governmental officials have taken oath to uphold, and which must ever be the shining examples to our young people - the future citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

We further oppose the proposed Constitutional change because its passage will not be a credit to our beloved State which has been respected for its manifest leadership and allegiance to ideals fundamental to democracy.

We herewith, re-affirm our faith in a government of law, under God, designed to permit each individual to develop as fully as he can, without legal or extra-legal barriers erected against him. We rededicate our lives to the task of helping human beings to become free, not only from the chains which shackle their bodies, but also from the misunderstandings, prejudices and fears which enslave people's minds and consciences. These are the things which make it possible for people to hide their faces in the sands when all which they, as high level Americans and Christians profess to love is placed in jeopardy.

We, therefore, call on all of our members and all teachers and other citizens of Virginia; also the members of the Parent-Teachers Association to vote against the calling of this limited Constitutional Convention. We also urge all people who are interested in preserving and maintaining and supporting the principles of Democracy and an efficient system of public education to vote against the limited Constitutional Convention.

Executive Committee
Virginia Teachers Association

December 11, 1955